

ALASKA ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 24, ISSUE 2

SEPTEMBER 2020

CALENDAR

No events are currently scheduled. A *Crevice* will be sent to notify you of changes.

In the interim, follow us at:

WWW.AKROCKGARDENSOCIETY.ORG

And on Facebook at:

[HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ALASKAROCKGARDENSOCIETY/](https://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ALASKAROCKGARDENSOCIETY/)

FROM OUR PRESIDENT, FLORENE CARNEY

This will certainly be a summer to remember. It's surprising how it changes your perspective of your garden when you are fairly certain no one but your immediate family will be seeing it!

In spite of the fact that we were social distancing, our intrepid weeders were able to get the Palmer Visitor Center Garden looking better than it has in years. We had made a "deal" with the Cooperative Extension at the Experiment Farm in Palmer to revive what they referred to as a rock garden in exchange for using their meeting room. It turned out to be a "rain garden" providing an outlet for the water running off the roof of the building. There were some really nice plants in it and

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also some serious weeds. The finished project looks garden worthy and I think they were pleased. We are yet to have a meeting in their facility. Although I haven't seen it, reports are that the rock garden at ABG is also looking good. They had the challenge of only having one person at a time in the garden due to Covid rules that ABG was practicing, but they stuck with it and persevered. There will be reports on these gardens elsewhere in the Newsletter.

The Board will be assessing how we can all meet up and what programs would work well in the current trying conditions. Would you be interested in ZOOM Meetings? Or perhaps you have another idea. Please contact me if you have a suggestion. Watch your e-mail for a "Crevice", which is our fill-in Newsletter used for special announcements.

Several people have told me they feel like life has just stopped and they are having a hard time getting in gear. I understand the feeling. I look out and there is so much to do, but I can hardly drag myself out to get it done. Perhaps we need a project. Something that we can accomplish as a group. I propose that we all inventory our rock garden plants. Let's start with your top ten plants (Phase 1) Make a list of the plant, its common name and scientific name, if you know it, when you got it, conditions its planted in and whether or not its thriving. You can add other information (let us know your ideas) I will put the lists together or perhaps a committee will. Phase 2 could be plants from the China trip that have survived; Phase 3 Alaska Natives. In the end we will have a marvelous list of the plants that survive here and good information on how to plant them. I know that the Georgeson Botanical Garden would like information like that and ABG could probably use it as well. New members always want information on the best plants to start out with. If someone is good at setting up lists, let's put the form on the Web site so it can be printed off by anyone who wants to participate. Give me a shout out (email: snow-fire@mtaonline.net or text (907)355-5309) At least we can say Covid didn't get the best of us!

THOUGHTS ON MY ROCK GARDEN

Linda Myers-Steele

(Linda's rock garden was on the Summer Rock Garden Tour in 2019. She is a published author, Master Gardener, has a delightful vegetable garden and her garden will be listed as a favorite in the upcoming issue of [Garden Gate Magazine](#))

1. My favorite part of having a rock garden is the rocks! I like the rocks to show because they are so pretty especially after a rainfall. I also like plants that behave themselves and don't spread seeds everywhere. If a person is not inclined to propagate seedlings, deadheading soon and frequently will keep the garden cleaner. Each plant is special in itself and I like for them to show, but not take over. It also helps to keep plants in place and not growing over the paths or "plazas" that I have developed so I have places to stop while working.
2. Plants I wish I had not planted in the rock garden include Cypress Spurge. It is so pretty-- lime green in the spring and turns to an evergreen looking plant and red in the fall. While it's very pretty, it travels all over the garden via runners under rocks and other plants. And, the milky sap is poisonous. Others are tall red sedums and low-growing yellow Snowcrop. They would take over if not kept in-check. I loved the look of Thyme creeping through the walking paths, but given a sunny summer they would take over the garden also.
3. I like plants that stay self-contained in one place, or slowly spread, and if I want to split them I can such as Silver Mound, Pulsatillas, Moss Campion, and Shooting Star.
4. Jim says, never, never, never plant campanula in the rock garden! He pulled roots that were as big as sweet potatoes! And, it's growing back!!





NEW PLANTS IN ANCHORAGE

I AM SLOWLY EXPANDING THE NUMBER OF PLANTS THAT I TRY TO GROW, NECESSARILY FROM SEED, SINCE MOST ARE NOT FOR SALE ANYWHERE.

KATHY SWICK

Penstemon palmeri

This plant can grow up to four feet tall in its native environment and has the largest flowers in the genus, which are honey-scented. It is native to the Southwest U.S. and also was introduced successfully by the highway department into Idaho. From seed planted in Feb, 2019 seven sprouted in the spring. Three of those survived the first winter in a pot outside, and only one survived when snow cover disappeared during the freeze/thaw cycles of spring weather. This plant grew on happily this summer (pictured still in its pot). Gina Docherty had better survival among those that wintered in the ground and she got some slight flowering. We hope in time the plant will attain its mature height and show us its typically huge pink flowers. I look forward to getting it in the ground for its second winter, with hopes of sharing a blooming picture next season.

Penstemon laricifolius ssp. laricifolius

This plant has been compared in appearance to a delicate branch of larch stuck in the ground. You would never guess it is a Penstemon until it blooms. It is native to Wyoming and Colorado and is suitable for a dry garden or trough. It was planted and germinated in 2019 and spent the first winter in a very well-drained trough with good snow cover. Two out of the three seedlings survived. It is very appealing and I look forward to seeing its pale pink delicate blooms.

Penstemon gormanii (one of only three Alaska natives)

Verna's Pratt's Alaska Highway wildflower book says this native is seen not too far from the Yukon River drainage, on dry, rocky sandy slopes, most accessible at Haines Junction or Circle. Verna also describes it as having multiple showy stems up to 12" tall with lavender to violet flowers. I received two batches of seed from the NARGS seed exchange, one from a garden in Utah, and one from an Alberta garden. The two batches turned out to be different. The first one produced small seedlings that do not seem very strong, but the second seed lot has more vigorous, easier to grow plants. I germinated about 15 plants, gave 4 away to other gardeners, planted 4 at ABG, and planted the rest in various locations in my own garden. My plants and the ones at ABG have about a 60-75% survival rate after one winter and two summers. The foliage is a beautiful compact blue green. I eagerly await them to grow larger and bloom. As far as known, this is the first time they have been grown in a garden. Hooray!

Seed Sources

Alplains Seed alplains.com

This is my favorite source of seed, since it is all wildcollected in the western U.S., very accurately identified and described.

American Penstemon Society penstemons.org

Penstemon seed only, for members, mostly open-pollinated from member gardens, identity is very accurate.

NARGS Seed Exchange nargs.org

Economical, large seed list for members, errors in seed identity are common. Mostly from member gardens.



Penstemon photos by Kathy Swick

Penstemon palmeri



Penstemon laricifolius ssp. laricifolius



Penstemon gormanii





WEEDS, NO MATTER THE NAME

We threw out the question "What is the most aggravating weed in your garden"?

Here are the responses.

Dorte Mobley - Of course my complaint would be the horrible *Anemone sylvestris*. That thing is impossible to get rid of - runs everywhere underground and spreads seeds all over too if you don't dead head it.

Paul Marmora - *Anemone sylvestris* has moved across my yard and has opened swath across my rock garden in its quest for sun. I dig out hundreds of plants a year.

Pink pussy toes is another that has spread prodigiously. As a native it cannot be labeled invasive, but it certainly has turned into a garden thug.

And the equisetum... sigh.

Marian Elliott - Bird Vetch by far. I just keep pulling it. Next is wild rose. Keep digging those out. This year a new plant has spread itself through my two rock gardens, front and back. Blue bird clematis. Those are easy to dig out and transplant. I probably should mention my dwarf dog wood. It keeps wanting to expand its domain so that's something else I keep pulling out. I don't really see any of this as a major problem. Just the work needed to keep things tidy.

Linda Myers-Steele - The most invasive species in my rock garden is Cypress Spurge. It is so pretty--lime green in the spring and turns to an evergreen looking plant and red in the fall. While it's very pretty, it travels all over the garden via runners under rocks and other plants. And, the milky sap is poisonous.

Pussy Toes is also mighty invasive. Seeds blow and it pops up all over. I tried this year to deadhead sooner rather than later.

Lisa Humphreys - My most hated weed is the bird vetch (*vicca craccia*) "Vetch on Crack". It is not only an invasive strangle weed but when you pull it if you leave even a smidgen of it that smidge starts a whole new patch it seems!

Kathy Swick - The purple monster is going to outlive all of us, no matter what we do to discourage it.

Jamie Smith - The two major invasive species I keep finding are Mare's Tail and Chickweed. NOTE: DO NOT PUT EITHER OF THESE INTO YOUR COMPOST!

Nancy Williams - I thought I couldn't hate a weed more than dandelion or horsetail, but even more invasive than those is what I know as Butter and Eggs. It looks like a snapdragon like flower in yellow and orange and it is the worst ever.

Erika Wolter - You mean things that I've purposefully planted? I don't really hate any of those but the one that is giving me the most maintenance work is my Purple Robe Saxifrage. Thing literally grows like a weed. I'm glad it's potted because if I actually had it in a trough or in the ground it would quickly crowd out everything else. Started out as a little tiny thing that I got from Jaime in June. It's grown so much since then it's now in a 10 inch pot and almost in need of a size bigger. I'm going to have to trim it down.

In terms of things I haven't planted? It's a toss up between horsetail and tansy.

This is YOUR rock garden society. The organizers and coordinators would like this society to be responsive to YOUR needs and desires. What topics would YOU like to see addressed in our monthly meetings? What would YOU like to learn (more) about? What speakers would YOU like to hear? What program topics would draw YOU to a meeting? Please address all comments, suggestions, requests, feedback, etc., to our program coordinator, Dorte Mobley, through our president, Florene Carney, (907) 376-5390; snowfire@mtaonline.net.



A LONG TIME COLLABORATION

Alaska Rock Garden Society
and Alaska Botanical Garden

Florene Carney

In the last year I have had many questions from members about whether we have an agreement with Alaska Botanical Garden, who makes the decisions, and how we make it all work. I spent some time going through all the information I have and couldn't find any agreement and didn't remember ever having one. I do however remember Panayoti commenting when he was here one time that over time things at the Botanical Garden would have to be more formalized. He was surprised at how relaxed we were in the beginning. Since I didn't have any idea what the "rules" are I called ABG and spoke with Mike Monterusso. He isn't aware of an agreement either, but reviewed their policy on collections management. I asked that he write a paragraph for our Newsletter explaining a little about a collaboration might work. It boils down to the fact that we are in that phase of becoming more formalized. Mike expressed appreciation for the volunteers who keep the rock garden looking good, donate, raise money and agonize over it. We agreed to have a meeting with all concerned and discuss parameters as soon as we can actually have meetings. Following is Mike's contribution:

The Alaska Botanical Garden (ABG) is a nonprofit living museum. Its mission is to showcase the beauty and value of Alaska's gardens and natural areas through science, education, and recreation using organic and sustainable practices. I'd like to take a moment to focus on the "living museum" portion of that statement. Along with hundreds of other botanical gardens around the world in major cities such as Denver, Missouri, and New York, ABG is firmly positioned in the museum industry. Virtually all museums with living or nonliving collections follow industry standards regarding the selection, display, maintenance, and eventual removal of collec-

tion items from displays and holdings. These items are generally referred to as "accessions". Museum curators follow these industry standards closely and in doing so strive to maintain and improve the overall value of the collections held in their care. Beyond basic maintenance, several factors contribute to the value of an accession and thus the overall collection. For botanical gardens specifically, these factors include the item's provenance (a specific item's origin and transfer of ownership), nativity (where the species originated), and level of global concern (how rare it is). The more complete an item's history, the more value it contributes to the overall collection. In order to maximize the value of an entire collection, it is essential to create and follow written guidelines and procedures for plant selection, installation, and care. ABG has a Collections Management Policy that guides staff through this process. If you'd like to review ABG's Collections Policy, or would simply like to discuss ABG's holdings in general, please feel free to reach out to me directly at (907) 562-7010 or mike.monterusso@alaskabg.org.

Mike Monterusso is the executive director of Alaska Botanical Garden. He holds a master's degree in horticulture from Michigan State and has experience curating plant collections at botanical gardens in Michigan, North Carolina, and Alaska.

Mike Monterusso
Executive Director
Alaska Botanical Garden
(907) 770-3692
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Mark E. White Dies June 2, 2020

Lifetime ARGS member Mark White, 64, died in June of cardiac arrest in Providence Alaska Medical Center.



Mark inherited a strong work ethic and had constantly expanding interests in horticulture, travel, weaving, crocheting, and cooking. He raised rabbits, chickens, and had beautiful gardens and loved his greenhouse. He was known in the horticulture community as an expert on arctic and alpine plants.

SIDE NOTE

Erika Wolter

Erika is new to ARGS this year and has a passion for tracking down rare and usual plants and seeds. We are excited to welcome her to our membership.

I've talked to a lot of folks - including Rick Lupp down in Seattle - about Chukchi Primrose seeds. He successfully grew them from seed but it was too hot in Seattle for them to do more than bloom. The only for sure known source where some seeds are now is the Kew seed bank but they won't share unless an organization requests them. No private individuals. Even though the seeds were gathered in Alaska by the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The gentleman who ran the seed gathering program for BLM directed me to researchers at UAA who might know of some hiding locally (the Plant Materials Center doesn't have any). I'm waiting to hear back from them.

However, Rick also got me in touch with a gentleman up here who - while he doesn't have Chukchi Primrose - did give me very specific directions on where to find the Mountain Forget-Me-Nots as well as yellow fireweed (which I had no idea even existed let alone be a native plant here.) I'm going to see if I can't find both this weekend and next. Fingers crossed! (If I find the yellow fireweed I promised to get some seeds for the center in Palmer.) :)

MUSINGS FROM HOMER

Teena Garay

(Teena was a member of the 2000 Plant Expedition to Yunnan that ARGS sponsored, she is an accomplished gardener, living in Homer, Alaska, and has contributed many great articles to our Newsletters over the years. Since most rock gardeners grow a huge variety of plants this seemed pertinent as a follow up to the plants brought back from Yunnan)

On another note, I really need to try and get cuttings off the Hydrangea sp. that came from the 2000 trip to Yunnan, it's really a first class shrub. Unfortunately it never sets seed and I need to try cuttings which I never have tried before. It starts out cream, then gets a cotton candy tinge to it and then turns dusty rose. The fall color is apricot and the stems are burgundy. This year there is a branch that has extra large flowers and are totally cream. For the last 19 years it has performed better than any other Hydrangea's I have, which are the Hydrangea paniculata and Hydrangea arborescens 'Lime Ricky'.



My second favorite was from seed I got from Verna, who got it from NARGS. She asked me to try the seed and see if it would grow here. Although its not as beautiful as the one from Yunnan, its pretty good. It blooms a week earlier and stays a nice cream color and then the foliage turns yellow. I'm attaching photos of both, the last two



from the seed Verna gave me. I have to say, the Hydrangeas are a wonderful fall shrub for us.



Seeds collected in Yunnan by ARGS Expedition.



Seeds collected in Yunnan by ARGS Expedition.



Grown from NARGS seeds from Verna.



Grown from sNARGS eeds from Verna.



POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

President: Florene Carney, HC 31 Box 5212, Wasilla, AK, 99654. (907) 376-5390; e-mail: snowfire@mtaonline.net

Vice-President/Program Chair: Dorte Mobley

Secretary : Jaimie Smith, (907) 376-7863; topgun@mtaonline.net

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Past President: Carmel Tysver

Membership: Gina Docherty

Newsletter Editor: Charles J. Utermohle, 5021 Southampton Dr., Anchorage, AK 99503-6964; (907) 231-5460; thule@alaska.net

Seed Exchange: Debbie Hinchey

Librarian: Kathy Swick

Palmer Visitors Center Garden: Jaime Rodriguez, (907) 357-2747; jrtinker@mtaonline.net

ABG Rock Garden: Madge Oswald, (907) 345-5144; johnmadge@chugach.net

Sunshine Committee: Dorte Mobley

WWW.AKROCKGARDENSOCIETY.ORG

Webmasters: Carmel Tysver, Florene Carney, and Gina Docherty

ARGS is on FACEBOOK at:

<https://www.facebook.com/alaskarockgardensociety/>

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Join Us!

We have about six meetings per year, plus Plant sales, Field Trips and a Seed Exchange. Our meetings are generally on the third Saturday of the month, Fall, Winter, and Spring, and rotate between the Mat-Su Valley and Anchorage. To Join, and receive this newsletter, send your name, address, Phone number, e-mail address and a Check payable to ARGS at 12001 Audubon Dr., Anchorage, AK 97516 or on the web at <https://www.akrockgardensociety.org/membership.html>

:
 Individual Membership \$15.00
 Family Membership \$20.00
 Canada Membership: \$20.00 US
 Overseas Membership \$25.00 US

Membership is for the calendar year and includes all issues of the newsletter for that year. The ARGS Newsletter is published 6 times per year. We invite your contributions. Please contact Charles Utermohle, ARGS Editor, at thule@alaska.net or 907.231.5460.

ARGS Newsletter Dates

	<u>Submission date</u>	<u>Distribution Date</u>
Feb/Mar issue	January 15	February 1
April/May Issue	March 15	April 1
Summer issue	May 15	June 1
Sept/Oct issue	August 15	September 1
Nov/Jan issue	October 15	November 1

**THE GARDENING LIFE MAY BE FULL OF SWEET DELIGHTS, BUT GARDENERS ARE GENERALLY NOT HEDONISTS.
 DES KENNEDY**



JOIN NARGS

If you are not already a member, considering joining the North American Rock Garden Society. (NARGS) The “Rock Garden Quarterly for Winter 2019/2020” just came and it is pure eye candy. Great articles on alpines, gardens, and upcoming events. Go to www.args.org/join and give yourself a gift that lasts all year.

Your Article Here

Send your story ideas to:

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thule@alaska.net

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PLEASE
PLACE
STAMP
HERE